



Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education

Volume 2004

Article 2
DOI: 10.17077/2326-7070.1374

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Recommended Citation

Unrath, Kathy (2004) "Mentor's Introduction," *Marilyn Zurmuehlen Working Papers in Art Education*: Vol. 2004 , Article 2.
<https://doi.org/10.17077/2326-7070.1374>

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Mentor's Introduction:

Kathy Unrath

University of Missouri-Columbia

Belinda Smith began her doctoral work in Art Education in 2001 with a research agenda that evolved around arts integration. As she began to investigate and work with an expressive arts elementary school, she was impressed by the enthusiasm, careful planning, execution, and dedication to team teaching/learning approaches that connected the entire school curricula in, through, and about the arts. During collection and analysis of data on this school for class research assignments, she became interested in the teachers' and administrators' voices and what they thought and felt about the delivery of their expressive arts program. How did they perceive their teaching and their students' learning? How did it compare with traditional programming? What were the factors of teacher and student learning and did relationships exist between these variables?

After conducting additional teacher and principal (former and present) face-to-face interviews, collecting field notes, and assuming the role of participant observer, the importance of recording and analyzing voices of former students and parents of this expressive arts elementary school was evident to her. She maintains that the perspectives of former students (now completing the eighth grade) and their parents of this expressive arts elementary school can inform the educational realm. The purpose of such a qualitative ethnographic interview study would be to examine the attitudes and feelings of these former students and parents and to consider and analyze their current understandings about the impact of the arts integrated curriculum delivery they have experienced.

Taxpayers, teachers, and elected officials are searching for the most powerful approach to learning that will ensure a quality education for our youth. Belinda concurs with others in art education (Eisner, 2003; Sautter, 1994) who claim that studies of successful arts-integrated schools need to be conducted. Revealing the impact of an expressive arts elementary school program, active for fourteen years, and the processes in context and nature of the choices made in its curriculum and delivery will contribute to such research.